



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

**IN SUPPORT OF HB 5263 - AAC POACHING**

Testimony by: Laura Simon, Field Director, Urban Wildlife Program  
Annie Hornish, Connecticut State Director  
Committee: Joint Committee on the Environment  
Date: March 6, 2012

Dear Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

The Humane Society of the United States urges your support of HB 5263 which would create a minimum \$1,000 fine for illegal trespass while hunting, trapping, or fishing and upgrade the crime from a Class C misdemeanor to a Class B misdemeanor.

Poaching is a broad term that can encompass a variety of crimes from hunting out of season, to killing over the legal limit, to illegally commercializing wildlife. This particular legislation deals exclusively with hunting, fishing, or trapping illegally on closed land—in other words, private land where the individual does not have permission to engage in hunting, trapping, or fishing.

Wildlife officials estimate that tens of millions of animals are poached annually in the US alone.

Poaching is an huge problem, not only based on the immense number of animals killed illegally, but also because far more often than not, poaching activity remains undetected and poachers go unpunished for their crimes. In fact, it is estimated that a mere one to five percent of poachers are ever caught by law enforcement. Poachers exploit wildlife and callously disregard the laws that protect it. They are the enemy of both animal protection advocates and lawful hunters.

Through our anti-poaching program, The Humane Society of the United States' staff has the great benefit of regularly communicating with wildlife law enforcement around the country and learning from those on the front lines of the effort to combat poaching. These hardworking officers from every corner of the nation frequently tell us that poachers are rarely, if ever, committing their crimes to feed their families. These wildlife officials note that these violators often have expensive weapons and trucks; for many poachers, a small monetary fine is simply the cost of doing business.

The battle to get poaching under control requires penalties, including the threat of jail time and the loss of license, that deter these crimes before they happen. Poachers who know that they face serious penalties will think twice before hunting illegally.

For these reasons, we feel that a comprehensive effort to upgrade Connecticut's poaching penalties is warranted. This bill is an excellent start, but it only narrowly addresses one form of poaching. This legislation would be a good model to apply to other poaching crimes. Under current law, the penalty for most poaching crimes, including killing big game out of season, exceeding the legal bag limit, and commercial poaching is a maximum fine of \$200 and up to 60 days in jail. These weak penalties do little to deter poaching crimes and are among the weakest in the nation.

The proposed legislation is a good first step toward bringing Connecticut in line with the rest of the country. We encourage the committee to adopt it and to consider future legislation to address the remaining weaknesses in our anti-poaching laws.